



Part Four:

Rhode Island's Urban and Community Forest Resources and Programs

From the tree-lined streets and parks of its cities to the expansive private and public woodlands in its rural towns, Rhode Island is richly endowed with forests and tree resources.

Data indicating the extent and status of forest resources in Rhode Island come principally from statewide and regional interpretative surveys conducted by the R.I. Statewide Planning Program or the U.S. Forest Service. According to 1988 state land use surveys, slightly over one half of Rhode Island's land remains forested.¹ This figure is down slightly from the 59 percent recorded in a similar survey done in 1970. Figure 4.1 graphically illustrates the statewide distribution of major forested areas in Rhode Island as identified in the most recent statewide land use survey (1988).

A recent U.S. Forest Service study put Rhode Island's forest cover at 56 percent of total land area.² An earlier Forest Service survey, based upon 1985 photography, estimated the state's forest cover at 404,800 acres, or 60 percent of total land area, of which 92 percent was classified as "timberland."³ Just under 5 percent of the state's area was classified as "non-commercial forest land", of which 0.6 percent was classified as "urban" forest land.

RHODE ISLAND LAND USE

1970

- Developed21%
- Undeveloped79%
- Forest59%

1988

- Developed29%
- Undeveloped71%
- Forest*55%

(*1988 forest figure includes forested wetlands acreage from RIGIS data, as forests and wetlands were counted separately in 1988 land use survey)

Sources: RI Statewide Planning Program, Land Use Trends in Rhode Island 1961-1988, Technical Paper Number 146. Providence, RI. 1998. & RIGIS data

1 RI Statewide Planning Program, Land Use Trends in Rhode Island 1961-1988, Technical Paper Number 146. Providence, RI. 1998. & RIGIS Land Use and Wetlands Coverages (1988).

2 Reimann, R., and Tillman, K. Photo interpretation for Fragmentation/Proximity Indicators in Southern New England. US Forest Service's Northeast Forest Inventory and Analysis Project. USDA Forest Service, Northeastern Station Radnor, PA. 1998. P. 5.

3 Dickson, D.R., and McAfee, C.L. Forest Statistics for Rhode Island---1972 and 1985. USDA Forest Service. NE Forest Experiment Station. Resource Bulletin NE-104. Broomall, PA. 1988.

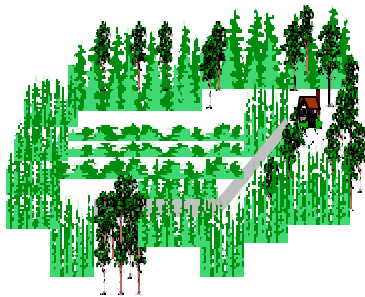
Figure 4.1
Forest Land Use Statewide

While useful at a statewide level to track the aggregate and distributional characteristics of forests, data at this scale are coarse; neither survey can adequately portray the intricacies of forest types and gradients present within individual communities. Neither study focused on urban forest resources, and both excluded significant tree resources on individual residential lots and streets throughout urbanized areas of the state.

The Community Forest as a Continuum

Geographically, community forests exist on a continuum, or gradient, ranging from large tract, working forests in rural areas, to fragmented forests in suburban areas, to residual pockets of forests in highly urbanized city environs.

Reflecting the degree of human alteration of the environment, major community forest categories or zones may be discerned in the landscape; each having differing implications for effective management:



Rural working forests and farms lie beyond the metropolitan fringe



Developed uses form intermittent breaks in the forests of the suburban fringe

Rural Forests—beyond the fringe of urban metropolitan areas, the rural landscape is a composite of large forested tracts, farmland, and isolated villages. Forest land is the predominant landcover, and forests are typically both ecologically healthy and commercially valuable. This is a “working landscape” where agricultural and silvicultural activities both support the local economy and help retain land as open space. Extensive tracts of privately-owned forest land exist in a number of Rhode Island’s rural communities, and provide many benefits at little cost to the community at large.

Suburban Fringe—typified by pockets of recent development interspersed throughout extensive stands of intact forest land. Woodlands remain the dominant landcover, but the infusion of development signals increased pressure on tree resources. Seen from above, developed areas exist as intermittent holes in the fabric of an otherwise dense forest canopy. Forests in such locales operate close to their optimal levels in absorbing pollutants, storing and metering runoff, and providing habitat for forest-dwelling species. In Rhode Island, the northern and western portion of South County, the western portions of Kent and Providence Counties, and the eastern-most portion of Newport County appear to fit the suburban fringe forest profile.

Suburbs—although dominated by lower-density development, sizable tracts of open forest remain in the suburban forest. Typically, residential, commercial, and industrial land uses surround isolated tracts or corridors, which development has “skipped over” because of watercourses, steep slopes, or other limitations. Tree canopy coverage in suburban areas exhibits many gaps, but is moderate overall, with trees planted or retained on large residential lots adding to tree density. As developed land uses increase, the holes in the forest canopy grow in size and number, the forest is broken into smaller patches, and its ecological values diminish. Large portions of Rhode Island, including much of the east and west bay, Providence County, Aquidneck Island, and eastern parts of South County seem to fit the suburban forest model.

City Residential—includes the older neighborhoods surrounding urban cores. Portions of Providence, Newport, Woonsocket, Cranston, Warwick, West Warwick, East Providence, North Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, and Cumberland appear to fit this profile in Rhode Island. Moderate to high-density housing—typically, apartments or tenements—is the dominant land use, and tree density is medium to low. Isolated dense stands of trees may be found in urban parks or along waterways, but, overall, the tree canopy is light, limited to yards and street trees. With fewer trees overall, the ability of the urban residential forest to perform ecological functions is impaired, but the value of clusters of trees in providing energy-saving micro-climatic effects continues to be significant for individual sites.

City Center or Urban Core—includes the commercial, industrial, and high-density residential development forming the traditional downtown or core of metropolitan regions. In areas such as the downtowns of Providence, Pawtucket, Central Falls, Newport, and Woonsocket, virtually all native vegetation is displaced by buildings and impervious surfaces. Street trees, planted in holes left in the pavement, and trees found in vest-pocket parks are often the only trees present in the urban core zone. Planting sites must be carefully selected and often re-engineered (soil enrichment, irrigation, etc.) to give trees planted a chance for survival. Still, tree vitality and life spans tend to be less than optimum due to the harsh environmental conditions. The scarcity of trees in urban core



Tree canopies of city residential zones are light; yard and street trees and isolated stands in parks comprise the forest



In the urban core street trees and vest-pocket parks constitute the forest canopy.

environs reduces but does not eliminate the benefits trees provide to residents.

The forest continuum model provides a lens for viewing the urban forest as an organic whole, but it should be noted that there is no sharp demarcation between zones, and the forests of individual communities can include aspects of more than one of the zones. Also, because it is an abstract, it does not represent all real-world situations. Some portions of Rhode Island, especially its island communities and areas where agricultural use remains viable, do not fit well in any of the model categories.

Another means of examining forest distribution as a continuum is to array Rhode Island communities by percentage of forest land cover. Figure 4.2 uses statistics from a 1988 statewide land use survey to array Rhode Island cities and towns along a continuum based upon the proportion of forested land (including forested wetlands) area to total land area .



Figure 4.2

Percentage of Forested Land by City and Town, Rhode Island 1988

Source: 1988 RIGIS Land use/land cover dataset. It must be noted that the forest cover statistics available in the Rhode Island survey are based on predominant land use type, and thus are **not** comparable to "canopy cover" statistics available for several other metropolitan areas in the country. Nevertheless, the data portrayed in Figure 4.2 do depict the general magnitude of forested land in Rhode Island communities.

Urban and Community Forestry Laws, Programs, and Institutions in Rhode Island

An important element of urban and community forestry resources in Rhode Island are the laws, programs, and institutions that the State, its communities, and private entities have created to manage physical forest assets.

Rhode Island Constitution

Article 1, §17 of the Rhode Island Constitution secures the right of the public to “the use and enjoyment of the natural resources of the state,” and directs the General Assembly to “provide for the conservation of the air, land, water, plant, animal, mineral and other natural resources of the state... and to adopt all means necessary and proper by law to protect the natural environment... .” Tree and forest resources clearly fall within the Constitutionally-directed protection of the natural resources of the state.

State Statutes

The Rhode Island General Assembly has enacted a number of statutes directly and indirectly governing the management of the state's trees and forest resources. Elements establishing the legal framework for urban forestry in Rhode Island include:

Department of Environmental Management

R.I. General Laws § 42-17.1 et seq. establishes a state Department of Environmental Management and authorizes it to “supervise and control the protection, development, planning, and utilization of the natural resources of the state....including.... plants, trees.....”

Within the R.I.DEM, the Division of Forest Environment is assigned responsibility for forest management, including “assisting other agencies and local governments in urban programs relating to trees, forests, green belts, and environment.”

Pursuant to this responsibility, the Division operates the state's Urban and Community Forestry Program, providing technical assistance and grants to municipalities and private groups in support of urban and community forest protection and enhancement. In addition, the Division provides cooperative forest management, wildfire prevention and suppression, insect and disease control, and management of state-owned forests. The Division works closely with the U. S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service, other units of DEM, municipalities, and private groups in pursuit of its forest management responsibilities.

Forested Wetlands

R.I. General Laws § 2-14-1 et seq., the Rhode Island Freshwater Wetlands Act, offers regulatory protection to approximately 75,000 acres of forest land that meet the statutory definition of a freshwater wetland. Alterations to wetland areas require permission from RI DEM's Director. In general, the Freshwater Wetlands Program seeks to avoid or minimize permanent changes that negatively impact wetland values. Activities may be permitted, permitted with stipulations, or denied, depending on their impacts upon the wildlife habitat, recreational, water supply, and other values of the wetland affected. Permit restrictions on cutting and clearing of vegetation, draining, watercourse alterations, and requirements for maintenance of vegetated buffers surrounding wetlands all help to protect the state's forest resources.

Municipal Tree Wardens

R.I. General Laws § 2-14-1 et seq., requires municipalities to appoint a tree warden and charges the appointed official with responsibility for the "care and control" of trees and shrubs within public land and rights-of-way controlled by the municipality, and of portions of private trees that extend into or over public roads or grounds. Tree wardens must be licensed arborists, are authorized to prune or remove hazardous trees at public expense, cooperate with the R.I.DEM in the suppression of pests and diseases, and propose regulations governing the care and preservation of suitable trees. Several municipalities have adopted tree ordinances that further detail the responsibilities of the local tree warden.

Criminal and Civil Penalties for Unlawful Cutting or Vandalism to Trees

R.I. General Laws § 11-44-2 et seq., prohibits persons from uprooting, cutting down, or otherwise injuring or damaging trees or underwood on land of another, without permission of the owner, and establishes a penalty of up to one year's imprisonment or a fine of (the lesser of) triple the monetary damage or \$1,000 plus compensation of triple damages to the wronged property owner. *R.I. General Laws § 34-20-1* creates liability for civil damages for the unauthorized cutting of trees or wood on the land of other persons.

Licensing of Arborists

R.I. General Laws § 2-19-1 et seq., establishes definitions, standards, examination, and licensing requirements for individuals and business entities engaging in the practices of "pruning, trimming, spraying or repairing fruit, shade and ornamental trees." The R.I.DEM is authorized to establish rules and regulations governing the practice of arborists.

Protection of Trees and Plants Generally; Replacement of Trees Removed on Public Land

R.I. General Laws § 2-15-8 et seq., requires that permits be obtained from the local tree warden, park commission, or state department having jurisdiction prior to the cutting or removal of any tree or shrub, or the burning of rubbish or debris on public lands. Any person, firm, or governmental entity that removes or substantially damages any tree on public land must replace the tree with substantially equivalent tree or trees, having the sum of the diameters equal to twice that of the tree removed or damaged. Public utility work in accordance with a properly approved trimming and replacement program is exempt from the requirement.

Right-of-Way Tree Planting

R.I. General Laws § 45-2-43 authorizes cities and towns to appropriate resources under the direction of the tree warden for planting shade trees upon (private) land adjoining a public right-of-way at a distance of up to 20 feet. This section allows municipalities the discretion to spend public funds to plant street trees on private land provided that the tree will function as a public tree by improving, protecting, shading, or beautifying the public way. This option allows municipalities to involve private landowners in the stewardship of what remain essentially street trees and gives flexibility to site new trees away from utility corridors, avoiding the need for severe pruning and improving their vitality and beauty. The City of Newport has utilized this authority in its tree planting and replacement programs and anticipates significant maintenance cost savings over the long term.



Right To Farm

R.I. General Laws § 2-23-1 et seq., finds that agricultural operations are valuable to the state's economy and general welfare and that they are being adversely affected by the random encroachment of urban land uses throughout rural areas of the state. The Act declares it to be policy of the state to promote an environment in which agricultural operations may be safeguarded against nuisance actions arising from conflicts between agricultural operations and urban land uses. The statute defines agricultural operations to include "forestry", and provides (generally) that no agricultural operation shall be found to be a public or private nuisance due to alleged objectionable odors, noise, dust, or use of agri-chemicals associated with generally-accepted agricultural practices. The Act further provides that no city or town may enforce any ordinance pertaining to the construction, location or maintenance of places for the keeping of animals, against any agricultural operation as defined in the Act.

Registration of Wood Cutting Operations

R.I. General Laws § 2-15-1 et seq., requires that any persons, firms, and corporations cutting standing or growing trees for commercial forest products must be registered as a woods operator with the R.I. Department of Environmental Management, and, further, such persons must file with the R.I.DEM a notice of intent to cut or saw at least five days prior to the cutting or sawing, and must utilize best management practices while harvesting trees.

State Guide Plan

R.I. General Laws Chapter 42-11 establishes a Statewide Planning Program, and requires the preparation and maintenance of a State Guide Plan for the physical, economic, and social development of the state. In addition to this Urban and Community Forestry Element, the State Guide Plan includes related elements that establish a policy framework for management of the state's forest resources: Forest Resources Management Plan (1984), Greenspace and Greenways Plan (1994), Outdoor Recreation Plan (1992), and State Land Use Policies and Plan (1989). Local comprehensive plans must be consistent with the State Guide Plan's policies.

Local Comprehensive Planning

R.I. General Laws Chapter 45-22.2 requires all municipalities to prepare, adopt, and periodically update local comprehensive plans providing a rational basis for decisions regarding the long term physical development of the municipality. A Natural Resources Element, which inventories and sets policies "for the protection and management of significant natural resources, including natural vegetation systems" is a required part of the comprehensive plan. Comprehensive plans must be based upon citizen input, must be internally consistent in their goals and policies, and must be consistent with the State Guide Plan. Local zoning decisions must be consistent with the approved local comprehensive plan's land use element.

Municipal Zoning Authority

R.I. General Laws § 45-24-27 et seq. requires, and establishes minimum standards for, all municipal governments to enact zoning ordinances. Ordinances are intended to regulate “the nature and the extent of the use of land for residential, commercial, industrial, recreational, agricultural, open space or other use....as the need for land for those purposes is determined by the city or town comprehensive plan.” A complete update of the state’s zoning enabling act was adopted in 1991. In addition to establishing permitted future uses of land that accord with adopted plans, the act authorizes communities to have “...requirements for: the density and intensity of use, ...landscaping, ...open space, ... and buffers, ...and, permitting, prohibiting , limiting, and restricting development in ...designated significant natural areas.” Municipalities may also adopt special provisions including incentive zoning, transfer of development rights, and regulation of “development adjacent to ...public greenspaces...or valuable natural resources.” As the principal governmental control over future usage of land, local zoning ordinances have great impact on Rhode Island’s forests.

Subdivision and Land Development Project Review

R.I. General Laws § 45-23-25 et seq., completely updated in 1992, requires all municipalities to develop and adopt regulations controlling the process of land subdivision and land development within their boundaries. Among the purposes of municipal subdivision/land development project review is “promoting the protection of the existing natural and built environment and the mitigation of all significant negative impacts of any proposed development” Municipalities are authorized to enact a master planning review process for approval of new development and subdivision projects and to adopt requirements for physical design, including: “...open space, landscaping,... and the relationship of proposed developments to natural and man-made features of the surrounding neighborhood.” Ordinances may also include public design and improvement standards for “landscaping, and ...soil and erosion control.” Standards for dedication of private land, or payment of

a fee in lieu thereof, in connection with new development are also authorized. Communities may utilize the powers and authorities conferred by the Land Development and Subdivision Review Act to require protection of existing tree resources and to specify requirements for replacement or new tree resources in connection with new development.

Municipal Tree Ordinances

Municipal governments have relied upon legal mechanisms to manage tree resources since at least 1807, when Detroit, MI adopted the first ordinance governing the planting of street trees. Tree ordinances have traditionally applied only to trees located on public land (in street rights-of-way or parks), authority over private trees being limited to trees endangering the public safety. Now, in some regions of the country, municipalities are adopting tree ordinances that extend public jurisdiction to trees and forests on private lands. They are requiring identification of significant tree resources in the development planning process, and protection or replacement of trees removed or destroyed by development on private lands.

Approximately 25 percent of Rhode Island communities have adopted a municipal tree ordinance. The communities having ordinances in place include:

- East Providence
- Middletown
- Newport
- North Providence
- Pawtucket
- Providence
- Tiverton
- Warwick

Several other communities are considering enactment of a tree ordinance.

These local tree ordinances are traditional in being focused only on trees on public property and hazardous private trees. These ordinances typically assert the municipality's jurisdiction over trees on public property, assign responsibility for their management to a public employee (typically a City Forester or Tree Warden), and establish procedures and requirements for alteration of public trees. Authority for pruning or removal of trees on private property that constitute public hazards is also generally bestowed upon the designated official.

The following highlights, from two municipal tree ordinances, are representative of other ordinances in effect:

Providence

- public trees are under the jurisdiction of the Board of Park Commissioners; the Board appoints a City Forester to enforce provisions of the ordinance.
- replacement of public trees removed, destroyed or severely damaged is required.
- prohibits more than 30 percent of trees from being cut, damaged, destroyed, or removed during redevelopment, razing, or renovating activities.
- authorizes the City Forester to formulate a Master Street Tree Plan, develop an inventory of existing trees, and to work with a Street Tree Advisory Committee, the Mary Elizabeth Sharpe Street Tree Fund, and private groups in furtherance of tree care and preservation.



Newport

- regulates the protection, maintenance, removal and planting of trees on public property, and in designated cases, on private property.
- establishes a Tree Commission, which, together with a Tree Warden, recommends regulations and prepares five-year and annual tree management and planting plans.
- Commission also serves as quasi-judicial board for deciding appeals of any order, requirement, or decision made by the tree warden.
- warden reviews all requests for planting, removal, pruning and/or trimming or cutting of trees in any public area.

- warden may cause or order to be removed or trimmed any tree on private grounds that is in unsafe condition so that it poses a threat to public or private property.
- warden issues permits for planting of trees on public property and may specify the species, location, size, and public safety requirements.
- requires protection of public trees during construction or excavation.
- replacement is required for all public, protected, or historic trees removed.
- at the discretion of the tree warden, municipal resources may be used to plant trees on private property up to 20 feet from a public right-of-way, provided they function as public trees and offer public benefits. Such trees become private property and must be maintained by the landowner.

Urban and Community Forest Programs

In addition to statutory provisions, a variety of programs enlist the resources of federal, state, local and private organizations, and private citizens in furtherance of protection and enhancement of Rhode Island's urban and community forests. The most significant of these efforts include:

U.S. Forest Service Urban and Community Forestry Programs

The 1990 Farm Bill granted expanded authority and provided resources for the U.S. Forest Service to work with states on urban and community forestry. A 15-member Urban and Community Forestry Advisory Council was established and \$25 million in annual funding authorized for community programs.

The Urban and Community Forestry Assistance Program offers technical assistance, education, and partnerships to communities and organizations.

The America the Beautiful Act, also passed in 1990, seeks to stimulate planting and improving trees in every rural area, town, and city across the country. Funding is provided for each state to create an urban forestry coordinator and to establish state urban forestry councils. Grants for tree planting programs are authorized.

Since 1992, Rhode Island has distributed over \$289,000 in America The Beautiful Program grants for local tree programs under the Forest Service's urban and community forestry programs. This amount was matched by \$566,000 in sponsor funds and resulted in approximately 2,800 trees being planted in communities throughout the state. In addition, the America The Beautiful Program provided \$139,000 in grants to support the organization and work of the R.I. Tree Council (and its predecessor groups) to promote and coordinate community forestry efforts statewide. Sixteen municipalities and nine state or local non-profit entities have participated in the Program since its inception.⁵

Related U.S. Forest Service Programs

In addition to its Urban and Community Forestry Programs, the U.S. Forest Service offers a number of other programs and grants which may support urban forestry objectives. These include:

The Forest Stewardship Program provides technical advice on forest resource management to rural forest landowners.

The Stewardship Incentive Program offers partnerships with rural landowners who follow a management plan on their forest land. Under the partnerships, the Forest Service pays a percentage of the costs for implementing an approved plan.

The Forest Legacy Program

The Forest Legacy Program helps private forest landowners, state and local governments preserve environmentally important forest lands by providing funds to state governments for the acquisition of land or conservation easements over the forested lands offered by willing sellers. Eligible lands must provide aesthetic, recreational, water quality protection, and habitat benefits and must be within identified Forest

5. America the Beautiful Grants Program Funding spreadsheet dated October 5, 1998, provided by Bruce Payton, Urban and Community Forestry Program Coordinator.

Legacy areas established as priorities by the State. Funding for the program by the Congress has been sporadic and less than authorized since the Program's creation in 1990.

Planning

In addition to providing state and local grants, the U. S. Forest Service has also taken a leadership role in region-wide planning for urban forestry resources. The Northeastern Area office of the Forest Service has developed and is implementing an Urban Forestry Five Year Plan 1995-1999, including objectives for awareness, outreach and environmental equity, partnerships, and comprehensive natural resource management.

Small Business Administration Tree Planting Program

From 1992 to 1995, the Small Business Administration offered grants for community-based tree planting and beautification projects administered through the R.I. Division of Forest Environment and the R.I. Urban and Community Forestry Council. In addition to beautifying communities, these grants were intended to bolster local economies by making public sector nursery and landscaping work available for firms hard-hit by an economic recession. A total of \$367,500 of SBA funding, matched by \$701,000 in other funding, resulted in over 3,300 trees being planted by 21 state, municipal and non-profit project sponsors throughout the state during this program.

R.I. Division of Forest Environment's Urban and Community Forestry Program

The Division (DFE) is authorized to cooperate with the U.S. Forest Service in distributing resources and providing expertise and assistance. In 1991, DFE established an urban and community forestry program and appointed a full-time urban and community forestry program coordinator. The program coordinator is charged with establishing a statewide urban and community forestry program

involving other federal and state agencies and the cities and towns, and with cooperating with private organizations in developing and implementing urban and community forestry programs and initiatives, including state and community Arbor Day programs, technical assistance to federal and state agencies, local communities, and non-profit organizations, administration and distribution of America the Beautiful grants to state agencies, cities and towns, and non-profit groups, and technology transfer of information on urban and community forestry issues.

The R.I. Tree Council

The Rhode Island Tree Council (formerly the R.I. Urban and Community Forestry Council) is a non-profit citizens group dedicated to sustaining, improving, and expanding Rhode Island tree resources. Established in 1991, the Council seeks to improve the public's appreciation and recognition of trees as vital components of the built infrastructure. The Tree Council cooperates closely with the Forest Service, R.I. Division of Forest Environment, municipal governments, and business interests as it seeks to develop strong partnerships for implementation of tree planting and stewardship efforts at the local level. It is constituted with Boards of Directors, Advisors, and Trustees, and standing committees of citizen-members working on state and local planning, local programs, education, and public awareness issues.

The Council's membership, activities, and impact have steadily increased since its formation. Among the programs the Council runs or has involvement in are: advising on the distribution of America the Beautiful grants to cities and towns, coordination and organization of annual Arbor Day planting programs around the state, assistance and advocacy for adoption of municipal tree preservation ordinances, implementation of a volunteer tree stewards education and public service program, organization of an annual conference, development of a research library, operation of a Notable Tree Program and annual publication of the Notable Trees of Rhode Island Calendar, and exhibits and informational booths at the annual R.I. Spring Flower and Garden Show and numerous other statewide and local meetings, exhibits, conferences, and workshops.

The Council is funded by grants from the U.S. Forest Service through the R.I. Division of Forest Environment, corporate support, membership dues, and fund-raising activities such as sales of its calendar. The Council's total revenues for 1997-98 are projected to exceed \$100,000.

R.I. Forest Conservators' Organization

A non-profit organization dedicated to the protection and wise use of Rhode Island's woodland resources, the Rhode Island Forest Conservators' Organization (R.I.FCO) works to promote the stewardship of Rhode Island's wooded lands and watersheds and better awareness of the role of a healthy forest in improving environmental conditions. It works with its members, many of whom own and manage significant forest lands, to provide information and educate the public on issues affecting Rhode Island's forests. In addition to forest landowners, R.I.FCO members include natural resource professionals, land trust and forest product industry representatives, and citizens concerned with forest conservation issues. Although the organization's focus is principally on conservation of rural "working" forests, its interests and objectives are generally supportive of urban forestry goals.

Examples of Community-based Programs

A number of Rhode Island municipal governments, allied with non-profit and citizens groups have undertaken significant community-based urban forestry programs. Examples of these include:

City of Providence Neighborhood Planting Program and Street Tree Endowments

Providence, Rhode Island's largest and most urbanized city, faces perhaps the most challenging urban forest management issues of any community in the state. The City is most fortunate, however, in

being the beneficiary of two philanthropic efforts devoted to the betterment of its tree resources.

Created through the cooperative efforts of the City government, the Rhode Island Foundation, and individual benefactors, two trusts have been endowed that provide a sustaining source of resources for street tree planting and maintenance efforts. The proceeds of the trusts are distributed through the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program, a non-profit organization that awards street tree planting grants to neighborhood groups on a semi-annual basis. These endowments greatly multiply the impact of investments made through annual public appropriations, and they offer an excellent model for emulation in other communities.

- *Mary Elizabeth Sharpe Street Tree Foundation*

Created in 1978 with a leadership gift from the Sharpe Family Foundation, this endowment supports the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program, a street tree planting partnership with the City government and over 300 groups of neighborhood residents. It has planted over 3,500 trees since 1989.

- *Helen Walker Raleigh Tree Care Trust*

In 1996, this trust was established as a companion to the Sharpe Street Tree Endowment. Its goal is to ensure adequate care for trees planted through the Providence Neighborhood Planting Program. Initiated with a gift from Mrs. Raleigh and matched with bond funding from the City, this fund will grow into a perpetual source of funding for pruning, fertilization, and weed control for the young trees of Providence.

City of Newport's Tree Program

Dedicated to protecting, maintaining, regenerating, and expanding the city's urban forest, Newport's urban forestry program was started in 1989 by the Newport Tree Society, a private group. With assistance from the R.I. Tree Council and DEM's Urban and Community Forestry Coordinator, the program was embraced by City government and has evolved into an effective public/private partnership.

Among the components and accomplishments of the City of Newport's program are:

- Adoption of a comprehensive Tree Preservation and Protection Ordinance
- Hiring of a full-time tree warden
- Increased investments in tree programs, currently averaging \$158,000 per year
- Appointment of a City Tree Commission
- Annual qualification as a "Tree City USA"
- Completion of a full inventory of street trees
- Establishment of a number of continuing tree planting programs, including the Street Tree Donor Program, Neighborhood Cooperative Tree Planting Program, Off-Street Tree Planting Program, and Bare Root Tree Planting Program
- Cooperation with private utilities to create a Tree Replacement Program and pruning clinics
- Regular tree maintenance, tree protection, and tree replacement, planning efforts

Other Rhode Island communities that have or have begun developing community-based urban forestry programs include East Providence, Glocester, Middletown, South Kingstown, Warwick, and Westerly.

